

New York Times bestselling author Andrew Gross discusses his latest novel, *15 Seconds*.

Where did you get the premise for *15 Seconds*?

Most thriller writers have to comb the newspapers for their ideas. The setup of *15 Seconds* actually happened to me! While in Houston on a book tour, I was stopped by a cop for a minor traffic violation which then escalated out of control. Much like my hero in the book, Henry Steadman, I was pulled out of my rental car, handcuffed, thrown in the back of the police car, and told I was going to jail. Immediately, six or seven other police cars arrived on the scene, sirens blaring, lights flashing, blocking off traffic around me. It was downright scary! They threw a lot of very threatening questions at me—all described in the book, ending with :What were you doing in a federal office building in downtown Houston less than an hour ago. . . ?” which got me shaking with fear. While the situation ultimately ended benignly for me, it doesn't end as well for my hero in the book—and believe me, far less so for the book's arresting officer!

The villain in this novel is ruthless, but you still manage to give him a backstory that adds an element of humanity. Why?

I think all my best bad guys share this quality. I don't believe in innate evil, nor do I want to make the character insane—that seems like a cop out and has never been a satisfying motivation for me. I tend to think of life as a series of random, unforeseen interactions that push or nudge us in one direction or another. I like to show that even the most ruthless killer might have just lived out a life without giving into brutality had not fate thrown them into a situation where that answer was the only way out.

In the novel, both Henry and Vance are fathers, and both are desperately trying to do what they think is best for their daughters. As a parent, did you find it difficult to write about either of these character's situations?

A little, I guess, as we have had the sort of history described in the book in our own family. But you pick up on an important theme. Both the hero and the bad guy are fathers, fathers who choose to protect and honor their daughters in radically different ways—yet the only ways they know how. It's what makes both hero and bad guy innately human.

***15 Seconds* is definitely a thrill ride. What do you hope readers will take away from reading this novel?**

My books all start with a random, local event that turns tragic and then raises the stakes immeasurably. *15 Seconds* shows how even the best life can come crashing down in an instant, and then asks: What do you do about it? It's why I build my stories on regular, everyman kind of heroes. They hold a mirror up to the reader's face and ask, “What would you do?”

What's next for Andrew Gross?

Well, the early buzz to *15 Seconds* has been so strong, I'm doing something very similar: another successful, likable person whose life takes an unforeseen, wild turn from the opening pages—except this time it's a woman.